



Director's Report October Board Meeting 2013.

The summer of 2013 was the driest summer we have had for many years. This has given difficult angling conditions over the North of Scotland with much reduced catches on many rivers. The Alness in particular has suffered from low water with a period of 115 days without a rise in water. The Conon with the compensation flows from the hydro scheme has fared much better than most rivers this summer. The count through Tor Achilty Dam is well ahead of last year and the five year average. This October meeting brings a change of Convenor to the Cromarty Firth Board. Many thanks go to Andrew Matheson who has been a most capable and effective Convenor and a warm welcome to Ian Duncan who was elected to succeed Andrew.

Bailiffing

A total of 28 people were removed from rivers by bailiffs over the summer. A man from Dingwall was convicted of taking sea trout out of season, with sentencing deferred until December.

The Board's patrol boat has been going through the process of being Marine and Coastguard Agency coded to ensure compliance with current legislation. This has been a lengthy process but will prove much more cost effective than the alternative of replacing the boat with a larger vessel.

This year, to reduce the administrative burden on angling clubs the Board distributed tags directly to anglers which seems to have worked well.

The Role of Bailiffs

The primary role of Fishery Board Bailiffs is to protect fish stocks. This is done both by the detection and prevention of poaching and by the regulation of legal fisheries.

With a large area to cover and limited resources, the deployment of Bailiffs has to be based on risks to fish stocks. These risks are greatest in different locations at different times of year. The deployment of bailiffs is based on many years of experience of the behavior of fish, particularly in relation to flow conditions. It is constantly reviewed and modified in response to intelligence received.

Information and reports from anglers are very useful and even when they don't result in an arrest will be used to plan future operations. Bailiffs will always attempt to attend when a report is made but unlike the police we can't operate a 24 hour call out service. If bailiffs can't be contacted whilst an incident is taking place it is important that a report is made to the police.

Although bailiffs do have extensive powers these must not be exceeded and they need evidence to be able to take action. If bailiffs are called then poachers should not be challenged or disturbed by anglers, otherwise by the time bailiffs attend the offenders may have either left or evidence of an offence may not be present.

The role of the bailiffs is changing as the Board and Trust's fishery habitat restoration programme develops. As well as the core skills relating to fishery law enforcement, bailiffs are also trained in habitat management techniques including; tree planting, instream habitat restoration and the use of spraying and chainsaw equipment.

Website

The website has been further developed this year and has allowed us to make public the activities of the Board and Trust.

The site is at www.cromarty.dsfb.org.uk and gives access to important strategic documents such as the Fishery Management and Biosecurity plans as well as regular news updates, monthly reports and dam counts.

Projects / research

Bankside restoration progress



Native trees are an important part of the river habitat which supports our fish stocks. They provide a significant nutrient input which supports the invertebrates salmon and trout feed on. Their roots stabilise banks and provide shelter for fish. The shading effect of native trees helps to reduce peaks of summer temperature, which in upland streams can threaten fish survival.

Working with the Forestry Commission and the Woodland Trust a number of bankside tree planting projects took place this spring. The trees have done very well and made good growth despite the drought summer.

Large woody debris

A new joint research project with the Forestry Commission to investigate the effects of restoring Large Woody Debris to rivers started this Autumn. Dead timber is an important habitat feature in natural rivers and helps to create variation in flows and depth. This results in moving and cleaning of gravel, providing essential habitat features for fish. The cover provided by dead timber is often used by larger parr and pre-smolts. By providing this essential cover the smolt production of a section of river should be increased. On a great deal of Forestry Commission and other upper catchment land trees

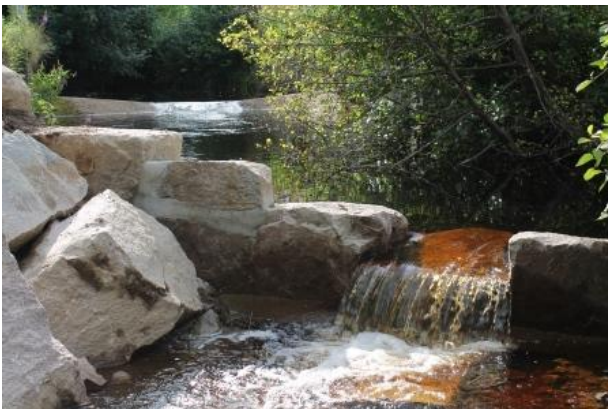
are largely absent from river banks and river channels tend to be very uniform with a lack of dead wood in them. This project aims to use techniques developed by the Wild Trout Trust to introduce and stabilise felled timber in rivers and monitor the effects on fish populations. Twelve sites were electro-fished and habitat mapped. Trees were added to six of these with the remainder kept as control sites.. Electro-fishing next summer will investigate the effect of the timber introduction on fish populations and large parr / pre-smolt production.



Peffery restoration project

Strathpeffer Weir

The weir at the Strathpeffer Water Treatment works was made passable in July by the construction of a new pre-weir and fish pass. This opens up around half of the best habitat in the Peffery catchment allowing access for sea trout. This project was delivered thanks to a great deal of hard work by staff at SEPA and Scottish Water who authorised and carried out the works.



Phase III of channel restoration in the Peffery

Following the success of last year's instream works which created improved fish habitat downstream of Strathpeffer further works took place at Fodderty in September.



Featureless dredged channel

Sycamore trees were felled and anchored to their stumps using steel rope. This provides cover for fish and helps to move and clean compacted gravel in the same way that the V log arrangements we used last year did. The steel rope anchor prevents the tree from being moved downstream by floods.



Felled sycamore

Electro-fishing

A number of electro-fishing projects took place this summer;

A fry index survey of the Balnagown was completed in June. This survey demonstrated the impact of the three weirs within the Balnagown Estate on the distribution of salmon in the river. It will be used to support an application to the SEPA restoration fund to improve fish passage.

Sea trout spawning burns were surveyed for the Moray Firth Sea Trout Project.

Electro-fishing to sample juvenile salmon for the joint Glasgow University / Marine Scotland Science project took place.

Monitoring of the status of salmon stocks upstream of the Corriefeol Fish pass is ongoing and showed more wild spawning upstream of the fish ladder again this year.

Electro-fishing for the Large Woody Debris introduction research was completed in September and will be repeated next year to investigate changes.

Riverfly monitoring

A series of Riverfly monitoring sites have been set up throughout the region and are being sampled monthly by anglers, ghillies and Fishery Board staff. The data is supplied to SEPA and is used to help monitor the water quality of our regions rivers.

UDN Research



In early summer there were a number of salmon reported showing head lesions characteristic of UDN (Ulcerative Dermal Necrosis). In the 1970's UDN resulted in huge salmon mortalities throughout Scotland. Despite extensive research at the time the cause of the disease remains a mystery. Thanks to the Lower Fairburn ghillies a live salmon showing symptoms of UDN was made available for analysis. The training which Board staff received from the SFCC was put to use and a very detailed autopsy was carried out. Samples of blood, all major organs and lesion tissue were collected and prepared for

bacteriology, virology and other analysis. The samples were then sent to Stirling University where research using techniques not available in the 1970's is being carried out to try and find the causal agent.

Mink Project

The Scottish Mink Initiative project came to an end in 2013 but has been extended with support from SNH. The extension of the project is to be carried out through the Fishery Trust network

PIT tag returns.

Each year a thousand of the salmon smolts leaving the River Bran are tagged with an electronic PIT tag before having the adipose fin removed and being released below Tor Achilty Dam. By mid September over 40 of last year's tagged fish had been recorded passing through Tor Achilty Dam as returning adults.

Meetings attended / consultations June - September

Dalmore Distillery weir
Teanninch Distillery
Wyvis Hydro Scheme radio tracking meeting
Dingwall Environment Group wildlife day
SEPA flooding meeting
Loch Glasa Hydro consultation
Highland Council presentation on work of Board / Trust
SFCC Management Committee
Highland Invasive Species Forum Meeting
Evanton Community Woodland Trust
Broodstock collection licence application to Marine Scotland
Forestry commission Scotsburn Forest Plan
Board Insurance annual review
Luichart windfarm
IFM Council Meeting
IFM Training Committee
Salmonid / beaver working group meeting
RAFTS salmon stocking workshop
Brahan hydro consultation
Dingwall Environment Group
Marine Scotland Offshore Renewables workshop
IFM bailiff exam

Luichart windfarm monitoring
Nigg quayside extension consultation
IFM Scottish Branch Meeting
Braham Hydro scheme consultation
Moray Firth Trout Initiative steering group
Marine Scotland Science Cromarty research review and planning meeting.
RAFTS Barrier prioritization meeting
Forestry Commission project planning meeting
Kildermorie Long Term Forest Plan Meeting
Easter Ross Long Term Forest Plan Meeting